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Doubts on SALT verification hard to shake

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Washington—The Carter administration is having heavy going with its claim that Soviet violations of the new SALT treaty could be detected from the outset.

If anything, concern that the Soviet Union could cheat and get away with it seems to be increasing.

Senator John Glenn (D., Ohio), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which will pass judgment on the SALT II treaty, has been briefed on the means the United States has for

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monitoring compliance with limitations on strategic arms. He said the administration is "dangerously over-estimating our current intelligence capabilities."

Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (Ret.), former chief of naval operations, took the same line yesterday in a television interview. He contended that the treaty is "unverifiable" but that it is otherwise so "bad" that ability to monitor it is a secondary issue.

Lt. Gen. Edward L. Rowny, the official representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the U.S. SALT delegation at Geneva, has been in town trying, among other things, to get improvements in the verification aspects of the pact. Though basic agreement has been announced by Washington and Moscow, treaty details still are being worked on in Geneva. General Rowny is concerned enough to be considering leaving the delegation.

Reports were published here at the weekend, and not seriously denied, that the Central Intelligence Agency sees a potential for cheating and therefore does not back the administration's verification claims.

While those claims have been reiterated by President Carter, Harold Brown, the Secretary of Defense, and others, no senator has announced his conversion to the belief that violations could be detected from the moment the treaty goes into

effect.

To the contrary, verification increasingly promises to be a dominant issue in Senate debate on the treaty.

The pact now is scheduled to be completed and signed at the June 15 to 18 summit meeting between President Carter and Soviet President Leonid I. Brezhnev in Vienna.

It is an enormously complex document, undertaking to limit not only numbers of strategic nuclear arms, as SALT I did in 1972, but qualitative advances as well.

It is the qualitative limitations, particularly on development of new types of missiles (limited to one for each side), that give rise to concerns about verification and chances for cheating.

Senator Glenn, a former astronaut, sees little if anything in either the historic record or the current state of U.S. monitoring capabilities to give him confidence that Soviet treaty compliance can be verified, or that Moscow would fail to press its luck.

He noted in a speech here last week that Russia got an advantage in numbers of submarines under the first SALT agreement by arguing a need to offset the greater range of U.S. submarine-carried missiles.

"Only a few months after signing the

treaty, however," he said, "we learned to our surprise that the Soviets had tested [a sub-launched missile] with inter-continental range 1,000 miles in excess of that which U.S. intelligence analysts believed immediately likely."

Then the senator turned to the current, or SALT II, negotiations. While it was being agreed that Russia's largest rocket, the SS-18, would be limited to 10 warheads, Moscow fired off one in a test that was capable of carrying at least 12.

The logic of the new treaty, Mr. Glenn said, is that "we should presume that they [the Russians] will be in violation of SALT II from the day it is signed."

Apparently, however, the "fiction" will be maintained that the limit on SS-18 rockets is 10 warheads. The Russians will be trusted not to deploy as many as they have demonstrated they can deploy.

Like many other verification critics, Senator Glenn regards with utmost seriousness the loss of Iranian monitoring sites that could tell whether limitations on new missiles were being honored. The sites overlooked Russia's main missile test center.

The administration has sought to persuade Senator Glenn that it can rig U-2 spy planes with long antennas and fly near enough to Soviet borders to do the work the Iranian stations formerly did.

"Where I part company with the administration," the Ohio senator replied, "is in its willingness to sign the treaty now, even before we know for sure how well these prospective systems are going to work or if we can even work out the difficult political arrangements to permit monitoring to be put in place."

The administration tends to count Senator Glenn among those it believes eventually will come around to support the treaty. But its grounds for encouragement about him, and others of like mind, seemed at the weekend to be somewhat shaky.